

## 7

## Dhanu-g,gahā Sutta

The Discourse on the Archers | S 20.6

Theme: Life is brief: strive on diligently

Translated &amp; annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Sutta summary and highlights

## 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

**1.1.1 Progressive speeds.** The **Dhanu-g,gahā Sutta**, “the discourse on the archers,” records the Buddha’s urgent call to us to be diligent in our spiritual practice. Time flies, the moments of life flies with it, and life itself is but a moment in cosmic time. The Buddha makes a progressive series of statements on the speed of flying arrows, a superman catching them, the speed of the sun and the moon, and the greater speed of the gods [2.2]—only to climax them with the speed of “**life-formations**” (*āyu,saṅkhārā*), that is, our life-moments [2.3.2].

1.1.2 The Jāvana,haṃsa Jātaka (J 476)

**1.1.2.1** This **Sutta theme**—on progressive speeds—is quoted in the introduction to **the Jāvana,-haṃsa Jātaka** (J 476).<sup>1</sup> The Jātaka refers to the Sutta as the Dalha,dhamma Sutta, “the discourse on the firm bow”<sup>2</sup> (J 4:211,20). In the Jātaka, the Bodhisattva, in his incarnation as the superswift goose, Jāvana,-haṃsa, performs the remarkable feats as described in the Dhanu-g,gahā Sutta [§§2-6].

**1.1.2.2** Jāvana,haṃsa (the Bodhisattva in a past existence) lived on Mount Citta,kūṭa with a flock of 90,000 other geese. As he flew majestically in the sky over Benares, the king, Brahma,datta, admired him and made offerings to him. In due course, Jāvana,haṃsa reciprocated and befriended the king, even washing him with the waters from Lake Anotattā and sprinkled him with sandalwood powder.

**1.1.2.3** Meantime, the 2 youngest of the geese wanted to fly and race with the sun. Jāvana,haṃsa warned them that they would fail at the risk of their lives. Disregarding him—like Icarus disregarding Daedulus in Greek mythology [1.1.3]—they went on with their plan. Fortunately, Jāvana,haṃsa found them out in time, and saved both of them before they nearly perished halfway in their flight.

**1.1.2.4** When Jāvana,haṃsa next met king Brahma,datta, he relates the exploits of the 2 youngest geese. The king, enthralled, asked Jāvana,haṃsa to show him how he could fly with the sun. Jāvana,haṃsa declined, saying that it was impossible. Instead, he suggested to the king to assemble 4 archers whose arrows could fly faster than lightning.

The 4 archers stood on top of a stone column and each faced one of the 4 quarters.<sup>3</sup> Jāvana,haṃsa declared that, as soon as the archers had simultaneously released their arrows in the 4 quarters, he would catch them all and lay them down at the archers’ feet, even within the tinkling of the little bell around his neck. Indeed, Jāvana,haṃsa flew so fast to catch the arrows as to be invisible to all those who watched, and retrieved the flying arrows before they hit the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> J 476/4:211,24-212,10.

<sup>2</sup> On this tr, see (2.1.1).

<sup>3</sup> “The 4 people each facing one of the 4 directions” (*ime cattāro janā ... cātu-d,disābhimukhā*, J 4:215,11).

**1.1.2.5** King Brahma,datta was very impressed. Then, Javana,haṃsa declared to the king that swift as he had been, there is something even swifter. When the king asked about it, Javana,haṃsa replied that it was the “life-formation of beings” (*sattānaṃ āyu,saṅkhārā*)—that the moments of life raced at an even swifter rate. The king was so terrified at this truth that he fell into a dead swoon.

When the king came to, Javana,haṃsa comforted him. The king then beseeched Javana,haṃsa to live in the palace as his friend. Javana,haṃsa replied that there was always the risk that when the king was drunk, he might order that the goose Javana,haṃsa be killed for his meal! The king then vowed never to take drinks and to remain sober. The story ends with Java,haṃsa advising the king about friendship, and promising that he would visit the king from time to time. (J 476/4:212-218)

### **1.1.3 Daedulus and Icarus**

**1.1.3.1** In Greek mythology, Daedulus was a skillful craftsman and builder. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8.183-235), Daedulus, after he had built the Labyrinth for king Minos of Crete, was imprisoned in a tower to prevent the knowledge of his Labyrinth from becoming public. Daedulus could not leave Crete by sea, as the king made sure every ship was carefully searched before being allowed to sail. Since Minos controlled the land and sea routes, Daedalus contrived to escape by air!

Daedulus set to work to build wings for himself and his young son Icarus.<sup>4</sup> He tied feathers together, from smallest to largest so as to form a wide surface. He secured the feathers at their midpoints with string and at their bases with wax, and gave the whole a gentle curvature like the wings of a bird. When the work was done, Daedulus found himself hovering in the air as he gently flapped his wings.

Then, he built a similar pair of wings for his son and taught him how to fly. When both were ready for flight, Daedalus warned Icarus “not to fly too high, too near the sun,” because its heat would melt the wax, nor too low, because the sea spray would soak the feathers and weigh it down. This is a hint at the “middle way” in our life’s struggle and progress.

**1.1.3.2** Father and son flew past Samos, Delos and Lebynthos, in the east of the Aegean Sea. By then, the boy, forgetting himself, began to soar upward towards the sun. The blazing sun softened the wax that held the feathers together and they came off. Icarus quickly fell in the sea and drowned.<sup>5</sup>

His father wept, bitterly lamenting his own arts, and called the land near the place where Icarus fell into the ocean, Icaria, in memory of his child. Later, the goddess Athena visited Daedalus and gave him wings, telling him to fly like a god. While the figure of Daedulus is often used to depict skill and inventiveness, that of Icarus refers to foolish exuberance, even hubris.<sup>6</sup>

## **1.2 KEY WORDS**

**1.2.1 *Daḷha,dhamma.*** The Sutta Commentary reads *daḷha,dhamma*, not as “strong by nature,” but as *daḷha,dhanuno*, “with strong bows.” Hence, *daḷha,dhammā dhanu-g,gahā* means “archers with strong bows” (*daḷha,dhanuno issāsā*). A “strong bow” is said to have the strength of “2000” (*daḷha,dhanu nāma dvi,sahassa-t,thamaṃ vuccati*). “The strength of 2000” refers to the weight of metal, such as bronze or lead, etc, (used for the arrowhead), bound to the bowstring when the bow is lifted before shooting, when

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarus>.

<sup>5</sup> A similar tragic story is told of Phaeton, the son of the Oceanid Clymene and the solar deity Helios, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phaethon>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daedalus>.

it is free of the earth (above it), when the bow is grasped by its handle and drawn back to the optimal length of the arrow.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.2 Qualities of the archers

**1.2.2.1** The line *seyyathā’pi bhikkhave cattāro daḷha,dhammā dhanu-g,gahā sikkhitā* [Ce Ee so; Be Se *susikkhitā* throughout] *kata,hatthā kat’upāsana catu-d,disā thitā assu* [§2] has been translated as “Bhikshus, suppose there were 4 strong-bowed archers, well trained, tried and true masters of archery [well-trained, dexterous, experienced in archery], one standing before each quarter.”

As already noted, the Commentary takes *daḷha,dhamma* as meaning “firm-bowed,” qualifying the archers [1.2.1].

Another **parable of the 4 archers** (in a different context) appears in **the Lok’āyatikā Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (A 9.38,4), SD 35.2.

**1.2.2.2** *Sikkhitā kata,hatthā kat’upāsana* translates as “well trained, tried and true masters of archery,” or more technically, “trained, expert, masters in archery” [§2]. *Sikkhitā* is found in the Sinhalese and European readings, while *susikkhitā*, “well-trained,” is found in the Burmese and Siamese texts. Both are applicable. Those who are “trained” means that they have studied the craft in their teacher’s school for 10 or 12 years. (SA 2:225,10)

**1.2.2.3** *Kata,hattha* (M 1:82,35≈S 1:62,2; A 2:48,13) (compare the Sanskrit *kṛtahasta*) = past participle *kata*, “done,” in the sense of being “trained, skilled, accomplished” + *hattha*, “(with regard to “the hand(s).” Idiomatically translated as “tried.” It refers to one “who has exercised his hands, dexterous”; hence: trained, skilled (in something; especially in archery; and is used with the locative). “Dexterous” (*kata,hatthā*): one who has simply studied a craft is not yet dexterous, but having achieved mastered it, one is dexterous. (SA 2:225,11)

**1.2.2.4** *Kat’upāsana* (VA 154,2; DhA 1:358,4) = *kata*, “done,” that is, trained, skilled, accomplished, experienced, + <sup>2</sup>*upāsana*, “practice in shooting, archery.” Idiomatically translated as “true masters of archery.” This is a technical term referring to being skilled in shooting or archery. “Experienced” (*kat’upāsana*) means that they have displayed their craft in the king’s court, and so on. (SA 2:225,13)

## 2 The speeds of world, body and mind

### **2.1 HOW SCIENCE HELPS US UNDERSTAND IMPERMANENCE**

#### 2.1.1 Motions

**2.1.1.1 DAILY MOTION.** We may be silently reading this or sitting still in meditation. The reality is that nothing within us and around us is still: everything is moving, especially in the physical universe. In simple terms, as we sit here reading this on planet **earth**, it turns on its axis once a day. Everything on and in the earth is moving with it. How fast are we turning?

The earth makes a full rotation in 24 hours. It moves at the greatest speed on a point on or near the earth’s equator (say Singapore), where it moves at close to **1600 kilometres per hour** (1000 miles per

<sup>7</sup> SA 2:225,6-10.

hour). The speed decreases as we move north or south. We do not feel the earth's rotation because gravity holds us down on the earth's surface.<sup>8</sup>

However, we can see evidence of the earth's rotation in the great cyclic streams of water in our oceans and of air in our atmosphere—this is known as the Coriolis effect.<sup>9</sup> As the Earth turns, faster at the equator and the slower the nearer the poles, great cycles of water and air circulate in the northern and southern hemisphere.

For example, the Gulf Stream, which carries warm water from the Gulf of Mexico all the way to Great Britain, and makes England warmer and wetter than it otherwise would be, is part of the great wheel of water in the North Atlantic Ocean. The Gulf Stream is part of a cycle that holds more water than all the rivers of the world put together. It is circulated by the energy of our revolving planet.

**2.1.1.2 YEARLY MOTION.** Besides spinning on its axis, the earth also revolves around the sun. We are about 150 million km (93 million miles) from the sun, and at that distance, it takes us one year (365 days) to go around the sun once. The earth's full orbit is close to 970 million km (600 million miles). To go around this immense circle in one year takes a speed of **107,000 kph** (66,000 mph)!<sup>10</sup> At this speed, we could get from Singapore to South Korea or from San Francisco to Washington DC in less than 3 minutes.

**2.1.1.3 THE SUN'S MOTION.** Our sun is just one star of several hundred billion others that together make up the Milky Way. This is our immense galaxy or "island of stars," within which each star is itself moving. Any planet orbiting a star will share its motion through the Galaxy with it. These stars move around in their own neighbourhood in a random manner.

The question now is: how do we describe the motion of a star like our sun, or measure the speed at which it is moving? Speed is relative motion: we need a "reference post" to which we can measure motion—which we define by comparing the moving object (earth) to some kind of fixed point (the galactic centre).

Scientists define a "local standard of rest" in our section of the Galaxy by the average motion of all the stars in our neighbourhood (to use an over-simplistic word for an immense quadrant of space). Even the nearest star is over 40,000 billion km (25,000 billion miles) away.

Relative to the local standard of rest, our sun and the earth—our solar system itself—are moving at about **70,000 kph** (43,000 mph), roughly in the direction of the bright star Vega in the constellation of Lyra. This speed is not unusual for the stars around us and is our "milling around" speed in our suburban neighbourhood of the Galaxy.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.1.2 Cycles and points**

**2.1.2.1 CIRCLING THE GALAXY.** Besides the individual motions of the stars within our Galaxy, it is itself spinning like an immense pinwheel. Now, the problem is that stars at different distances move at different speeds. However, we can focus on the sun's speed around the centre of the Milky Way. It takes our sun about **225 million years** to make a full trip around our Galaxy. This is sometimes called our "galactic year." Since the sun and the earth first arose, about 20 galactic years have passed: we have gone around

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.nap.edu/jhp/oneuniverse/motion\\_6-7.html](https://www.nap.edu/jhp/oneuniverse/motion_6-7.html).

<sup>9</sup> Coriolis Effect: how the spinning of the Earth affects the tides and winds  
[http://books.nap.edu/html/oneuniverse/motion\\_32-33.html](http://books.nap.edu/html/oneuniverse/motion_32-33.html).

<sup>10</sup> <http://curious.astro.cornell.edu/physics/general-physics/41-our-solar-system/the-earth/orbit/91-at-what-speed-does-the-earth-move-around-the-sun-beginner>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/galaxies>.

the Galaxy 20 times. Yet, in terms of galactic time, in all of recorded human history, we have hardly moved in our long path around the Milky Way.<sup>12</sup>

How fast do we have to move to circumambulate the huge circle of the Milky Way in one galactic year? The sun has to move at an astounding **792,000 kph** (483,000 mph)! The earth, caught in the sun's gravity, follows along at the same speed. Even then, this is still a long way from the speed limit of the universe itself—the speed of light. Light travels at an incredible **1.09 billion kph** (670 million mph).

**2.1.2.2 MOVING THROUGH THE UNIVERSE.** When we speak of the different speeds of celestial bodies, we always need to compare them to some “local standard of rest” [2.1.1.4]. When we talk about our speed going around the Galaxy, we measure it relative to the center of the Milky Way. Let us finish up by looking at the motion of the entire Milky Way Galaxy through space.

What can we compare its motion to—what is the right *frame of reference*? To understand this, we need to know a bit about the effect of the Big Bang on our universe. The Big Bang was the huge explosion that was the beginning of space, time and the whole universe. Right after the Big Bang, the universe was full of energy and extremely hot. In fact, for the first few minutes, the entire universe was hotter than the centre of our Sun.

Our universe was an unimaginable whirlpool of energy and subatomic particles, slowly cooling and sorting itself out into the universe we know today. The gamma rays (like the flash of a nuclear bomb) has stretched to become much longer, lower energy waves. These waves stretched the space they occupy, and so they filled the whole universe, just as they did when the universe arose. Some 12 to 15 billion years after the Big Bang, the universe today—and space itself—is still expanding at a great rate.

**2.1.2.3 COSMIC BACKGROUND RADIATION.** All these stretched waves are collectively called the cosmic background radiation (CBR).<sup>13</sup> Astronomers can now measure how fast the earth is moving compared to this radiation filling all of space. (Technically, our earth's motion causes one kind of Doppler Shift<sup>14</sup> in the radiation we observe in the direction that we are moving and another in the opposite direction.)

Put another way, the CBR provides a “frame of reference” for the universe at large, relative to which we can measure our motion. From the motion we measure compared to the CBR, we need to minus the motion of the earth around the sun, and the sun around the centre of the Milky Way. The motion that's left must be the particular motion of our Galaxy through the universe.

**2.1.2.3 NO REST ANYWHERE.** From this, we know that the Milky Way Galaxy is moving at an astounding **2.1 billion kph** (1.3 million mph)! We are moving roughly in the direction of the constellations of Leo and Virgo. This great attraction is probably caused by a huge concentration of matter—many groups of galaxies—from that direction. The short of this long story of our universe is that there is nothing that stands still for even a moment. Everything is in a constant state of flux, moving, changing, becoming other. This is the impermanence that is everywhere in the universe.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.windows2universe.org/?page=/the\\_universe/Milkyway.html](https://www.windows2universe.org/?page=/the_universe/Milkyway.html).

<sup>13</sup> [https://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb\\_tests\\_cmb.html](https://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/bb_tests_cmb.html).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.exploratorium.edu/origins/hubble/tools/doppler.html>.

<sup>15</sup> This section [2.1] is based on Andrew Franknoi's “How fast are you moving when you are sitting still?,” *Universe in the Classroom* 17, spring 2007: <https://astrosociety.org/edu/publications/tnl/71/howfast.html>.

## 2.2 ANCIENT INDIAN WORLD-VIEW

### 2.2.1 The speed of celestial bodies

**2.2.1.1** This **scale of progressive speeds** of the various parts of our physical universe [2.1] makes an interesting contrast to the scale of progressive speeds the Buddha mentions in the Dhanu-g,ahā Sutta, as represented in this table:

<u>The Dhanu-g,ahā Sutta</u>	<u>Motions in our physical universe</u>	
[§3] The flying arrows	(1) The earth on its axis: 1600 kph	[2.1.1.1]
[§5] The superman catches the flying arrows	(2) The earth around the sun: 107,000 kph	[2.1.1.2]
[§6.1] The sun and the moon	(3) Solar system towards Vega: 70,000 kph	[2.1.1.3]
[§6.2] The deities preceding sun and moon	(4) Solar system around galaxy: 792,000 kph	[2.1.2.1]
[§6.3] The ceasing of the life-formations	(5) The Milky Way: 2.1 million kph	[2.1.2.3]

Both the scales of progressive speeds give us the same idea of increasing astronomical speeds of cyclic motions—that of *the solar system speeding towards the bright star Vega in the constellation of Lyra*. This is a direct motion heading for its destination but not a cyclic motion like the rest. Even if we discount this motion, the general idea of *the scale of progressive speeds* is clear enough.

**2.2.1.2** The Dhanu-g,ahā Sutta opens with the Buddha telling us to imagine how a man with super powers is able to catch mid-air the flying arrows shot by 4 archers [§3]. The monks, when asked by the Buddha, replied that even if that man were to catch just *one* flying arrow, he would be considered to be superfast.

Having established a basic idea of relative **super-speeds**, the Buddha then goes on to tell us that the sun and the moon move even faster in the heavens [§6.1], that is, faster than a flying arrow, or the speed at which the superman is able to catch them. What is meant here, we may assume, is that the sun and the moon move faster than anything on earth itself.

### 2.2.2 Faster than the deities

**2.2.2.1** Yet, even faster than that these celestial bodies are **the deities** that race in their “mansions” ahead of these bodies [§6.2]. The Commentators imagine the deities in their “mansions” or “habitats” (*vimāna*)—what we today may imagine in space fiction to be aliens in their immense spaceships or even life-support systems—racing before the sun and the moon! The speed of these deities is said to vary, as they stop according to their needs (SA 2:227,7-11). Attha,sālinī (Dhs Comy) say that these are the Yāma deities (DhsA 60,30), the gods of the 3<sup>rd</sup> level above the humans (SD 1.7 App).

That the devas are faster than the sun and moon fits well into their time dilation effect in “special relativity” which can explain why their time is slower than ours.<sup>16</sup> This, then, as a whole, is **the parable of the celestial bodies**.

**2.2.2.2** The Buddha’s description of the scale of progressive super speeds of celestial bodies builds up to climax in the Sutta’s key teachings, of which there are two:

(1) “The life-formations pass away even faster than that!” [§6.3]; and

<sup>16</sup> My thanks to physicist Ng Xin Zhao for this explanation. 24 March 2018. Let the Buddhist scientists elaborate on this interesting point.

(2) The monks (including us)<sup>17</sup> are to “dwell diligently,” that is, work for awakening here and now [§7]. We will discuss these last two important points next [2.3].

## 2.3 ANALYSES OF THE KEY TEACHINGS

### 2.3.0 The Sutta’s purpose

We have noted that the purpose of the Sutta teaching is twofold [2.2.2.2]:

- (1) “The life-formations pass away even faster than that!” [§6.3; 2.3.1.1]; and
- (2) The monks (including us)<sup>18</sup> are to “dwell diligently,” that is, work for awakening here and now [§7; 2.3.1.2].

### 2.3.1 Life-formations

**2.3.1.1** The Dhanu-g,gahā Sutta apparently uses the term *āyu,saṅkhārā*, “life-formations,” in a non-technical sense. The Sutta’s key statement is that “**the life-formations pass away even faster than that!**” —that is, faster than even the superspeed at which the deities race ahead of the sun and the moon in their orbits through space. When we consider that the Buddha is addressing an ancient Indian audience that do are not as familiar with the universe as we do today, it is simply remarkable that he gives us such a parable for an idea of a scale of progressive speeds that prepares for a better understanding of *how rapid and impermanent our mind and life are*.

**2.3.1.2** Our “mind and life” are here represented by the word “life-formations” (*āyu,saṅkhārā*) [§6.3] —note that it is in the plural. Further, the Sutta says that the life-formations “pass away,” which seems to suggest that they occur in only a mental moment—but we need to examine more closely what this means.

The expression, *āyu,saṅkhārā*, refers to the moment of life or of consciousness (they actually refer to the same thing, but each with a different function), it must refer to *specifically* what we can imagine to be “mind-moments.” Or, more *broadly*, we can see it as referring to “life-moments” (which includes the time we spend sleeping, when we are unconscious, or when we are in deep meditation).

**2.3.1.3** By the time of the Commentaries, this non-technical word—“life-formations” (*āyu,saṅkhārā*) —was viewed, even redefined, in the light of the Abhidhamma that predominated the period.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the Commentary defines *āyu,saṅkhāra* as the physical life-faculty (*rūpa,jīvit’indriya*), that is, the material counterpart of the mental life-faculty (consciousness).<sup>20</sup>

The Sutta is telling us that the moments (plural) of our physical life (the 4 elements that comprise us) cease even more rapidly than all super-speed physical cases mentioned. The 4 elements (*mahā,-bhūta,rūpa*) refer to the following:

- earth (*paṭhavi*)            solid aspects (“resisting”) such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin;
- water (*āpo*)                liquid (“cohesive”) aspects such as blood, tears, saliva, phlegm, sweat and urine;
- fire (*tejo*)                 heat (“decay”), including metabolism, digestion and physical decay;
- wind (*vāyo*)                movement, including breathing, peristalsis, bodily gases.

<sup>17</sup> On *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhave* addresses all attending (incl us today), see SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

<sup>18</sup> On *bhikkhu* as addresses all attending or practising Buddhism, see SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

<sup>19</sup> See **Dhamma and Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1.

<sup>20</sup> For some idea on this Abhidhamma notion, see Karunadasa 1967:78-91.

These are the physical conditions of our body that are always in a state of flux. There are not really separate parts but simply the way our physical body functions.<sup>21</sup>

**2.3.1.4** What do the suttas tell us about *āyu,saṅkhārā*? Since we are not doing an academic research but seeking to understand the Buddha’s teaching that conduces to our practice leading to awakening in this life itself, we have the advantage and blessing of the early suttas which can help us here.

**The Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47a) is a very short but instructive sutta which is here quoted in full, thus:

There are, bhikshus, these 3 conditioning characteristics of the conditioned.<sup>22</sup> What are the three?

Arising	is discerned;	<i>uppādo paññāyati</i>
passing away	is discerned;	<i>vayo paññāyati</i>
a becoming-other of its presence	is discerned.	<i>ṭhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati</i>

These, bhikshus, are the 3 conditioning characteristics of the conditioned.

(A 3.47a), SD 33.11(1.3a)<sup>23</sup>

These are non-physical phenomena—the rise, alteration and fall of the mental moments—which are otherwise impossible to discern or describe. This “cessation” or breakup of the non-physical phenomena occur 16 times faster than physical phenomena (SA 2:227,11). This, in simple terms, is what the “life-formations” (*āyu,saṅkhārā*) refers to.

**2.3.1.5** Hence, there are technically 3 moments—arising, existing and ceasing—which, in Abhidhamma, are termed *uppāda, ṭhiti* and *bhaṅga*.<sup>24</sup> We should not take *ṭhiti* here in the sense of a “duration” of a persisting state—a “moment” is not a *state*; it is simply change. Change is nothing but the experience of time. When it is said that time “stands” (*ṭhiti*), it is not that time stops but rather that things *seem* to persist for a while—a duration. The reality is that it is a phase of “alteration, becoming other.” These are the minute but rapid phases of momentary change in our conscious life. This is the process of change that is so rapid that it is faster than the fastest event described in the Sutta [§6.3]. Simply put, it is faster even than the speed of lightning.

**2.3.1.6** Hence, the sutta triad of “**arising, passing away, and becoming other**” is a more correct [2.3.1.4]—a true and real—representation of true reality.

By “**true**” here is meant that this is a correct statement that reflects what is “**real**,” which means that it is what is going on out there. In an important sense, “true” refers to how we see things as “truth,” and “real” the object of our experience (“out there,” so to speak): it is a real, not projected or fabricated thing. When truth meets reality—seeing things as they are—we have wisdom that is both joyful (because it is real) and liberating (because it is true).

Reality inspires and sustains *joy* in us because we do not need to depend on anything else for our understanding of life; hence, we are truly happy. The truth sets us *free* because we have understood the meaning (the first 2 noble truths) and purpose of life (the last 2 noble truths).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On the 4 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 11,8-11, with §12 on “space”), SD 3.11.

<sup>22</sup> “The conditioned characteristics of the conditioned,” *saṅkhatassa saṅkhata,lakkhaṇa*.

<sup>23</sup> See SD 17.2b (1.1.2) & Table 2.

<sup>24</sup> This is sometimes known as the “dhamma theory” or theory of moments: see SD 26.1 (4.4).

<sup>25</sup> On the 4 noble truths as the meaning and purpose of life, see SD 1.1 (4.0).

### 2.3.2 “We will dwell diligently!”

**2.3.2.1** All we have mentioned about the rapidly changing moment so far is merely great theory, when we do not use this knowledge and understanding to keep up our spiritual practice [S7]. What is the urgency here, we must ask? It means that our minds—or better, mental moments—move very fast, very much faster than the bits and bytes, the ons and offs, of the fastest computer. Although our thoughts seem to persist—we seem to be able to hold our thoughts—the reality is that the thoughts are simply moving at their own super-speed, and we are only catching glimpses of it.

**2.3.2.2** We are only perhaps sometimes aware of **the preconscious mind** moments as we think, or before we speak or act. Often, we are not fast enough to stop or even modify the mind behind those acts, or to stop those acts, or negotiate them. We simply follow the flow of the mental moments—we lack the free will to act, as it were.<sup>26</sup>

**2.3.2.3** Deeper, even more powerful, than the preconscious mind, is **the unconscious mind**. It is a very active mind—motivated basically by lust, ill will and ignorance, and their various forms—only that we are not conscious of such activities.<sup>27</sup> These are our **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), working, controlling and directing us from the depths of our being, and keeping us going in this cycle of rebirths and redeaths, as the slaves of time and circumstance.<sup>28</sup>

**2.3.2.4** As we understand the Buddha’s teachings, we begin to see the insidious ways of the darkness in our minds. We simply need to shine the light of wisdom into this darkness to free ourselves from its hold on us. We cling to this darkness by trying to own this darkness—speaking of it as “I” (views), “me” (conceit) and “mine” (craving).<sup>29</sup>

Hence, to be free of this inner darkness, we need to learn to disown it: “This is *not* I”; “This is *not* me”; “This is *not* mine.” As taught in **the Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta** (M 28), we should understand what we really are—our body (as the 4 elements) and our mind (as consciousness)—according to true reality and right wisdom, thus: “This does not belong to me; this I am not; this is not my self.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On the “preconscious mind,” see SD 17.8b esp (1.1.2; 2.2); SD 7.10 (3.3).

<sup>27</sup> On the unconscious as latent tendencies (*anusaya*), see SD 17.8b (1.2).

<sup>28</sup> On “latent tendencies” (*anusaya*), see SD 31.3.

<sup>29</sup> For special studies on these, see “**I**”: **The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; “**Me**”: **The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; “**Mine**”: **The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

<sup>30</sup> M 28,6-22 (SD 6.16).

## Dhanu-g,gahā Sutta

### The Discourse on the Archers

S 20.6

1 (The Blessed One was) residing in Sāvattihī.

2 “Bhikshus, suppose there were **4 strong-bowed archers**,<sup>31</sup> [266] well trained,<sup>32</sup> tried<sup>33</sup> and true masters of archery<sup>34</sup> [trained, expert, masters in archery],<sup>35</sup> one standing before each quarter.<sup>36</sup>

3 Then, a man were to come along, thinking:

‘I will catch these arrows of *the 4 strong-bowed archers, well trained, tried and true masters of archery, one standing before each quarter*, before they hit the ground, and keep them.’<sup>37</sup>

4 What do you think, bhikshus, would this be enough to say,

‘That man is swift, possessing great speed.’?<sup>38</sup>

5 “Bhante, even if he were to catch just *one arrow of a strong-bowed archer, well trained, tried and true masters of archery*, before it hits the ground, and keep it—it would be enough to say,

‘*That man is swift, possessing great speed.*’

What more to speak of 4 strong-bowed archers, *well trained, tried and true masters of archery!*<sup>39</sup>”

6 “Bhikshus, swift as the man is, even swifter than that are the sun and the moon.

6.2 Bhikshus, swift as the man is, even swifter than that are the sun and the moon, and the deities that race before the sun and the moon.<sup>40</sup>

6.3 The life-formations pass away even faster than that!<sup>41</sup>

7 Therefore, bhikshus, you must train yourselves, thus: ‘We will dwell diligently.’<sup>42</sup>

Thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.”

— evaṃ — 180320 180325 180511

<sup>31</sup> “Strong-bowed archers,” see (1.2.2.1).

<sup>32</sup> “Well trained” (Ce Ee *sikkhitā*; Be Se *susikkhitā*), see (1.2.2.2).

<sup>33</sup> “Tried” (*kata,hattha*), see (1.2.2.3).

<sup>34</sup> “True masters of archery: (*katūpāsana*), see (1.2.2.4).

<sup>35</sup> The parable of the 4 archers recurs in a different context in (**Lok’āyatika**) **Brāhmaṇā S** (A 9.38.4a/4:428), SD 35.2. The archery description—*sikkhito kata,hattho kata,yoggo katūpāsano*—is applied to an archer in **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26), and to be applied to 4 boys, one each from the 4 classes, incl the opp qualities, in **Issattha S** (S 3.24)—both add the characteristic, “well-practised,” *kata,yoggo* (S 1:62,2) ≈ (S 1:99,10): see (S 2.26,5/1:62), SD 7.2 & (S 3.24,6.2/1:99), SD 44.18 respectively.

<sup>36</sup> *Seyyathā’pi bhikkhave cattāro daḷha,dhammā dhanu-g,gahā sikkhitā* [Ce Ee so; Be Se *susikkhitā* throughout] *kata,hatthā kat’upāsana catu-d,disā ṭhitā assu*. On “before each quarter” (*catu-d,disā*) is an idiomatic tr of *catu-d,-disā ṭhitā*: see (1.1.2.4). On this archer’s qualities, see SD 52.8a (1.2).

<sup>37</sup> *Ahaṃ imesaṃ catunnaṃ daḷha,dhammānaṃ dhanu-g,gahānaṃ sikkhitānaṃ kata,hatthānaṃ kat’upāsānaṃ catu-d,disā kaṇḍe khitte appatitṭhite pathaviyaṃ gahetvā āharissāmīti*. Note the durative verbal construction, which refers to a single action: *gahetvā āharissāmi*, “having caught (the arrows) ... I will keep them.” Another well known phrase is *upasampajja viharati*, “having attained (dhyana), he stays (in it)”: see SD 8.4 (5.1.1.2(3)).

<sup>38</sup> *Taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave javano puriso paramena javena samannāgato’ti alam vacanāyāti*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ko pana vādo catunnaṃ daḷha,dhammānaṃ dhanu-g,gahānaṃ sikkhitānaṃ kata,hatthānaṃ kat’upāsānaṃ -’ti*.

<sup>40</sup> On the deities racing before the sun and the moon, see (2.2.2.3).

<sup>41</sup> *Tato sīgha,taraṃ āyu,saṅkhārā khīyanti*. On *āyu,saṅkhārā*, see (2.3.1).

<sup>42</sup> *Tasmā’ti-ha bhikkhave evaṃ sikkhitabbarā. Appamattā viharissāmīti*. See (2.3.2).